

Remembering McCarthyism



Harry S. Truman, *New York Times* (17th November, 1953)

It is now evident that the present Administration has fully embraced, for political advantage, McCarthyism. I am not referring to the Senator from Wisconsin. He is only important in that his name has taken on the dictionary meaning of the word. It is the corruption of truth, the abandonment of the due process law. It is the use of the big lie and the unfounded accusation against any citizen in the name of Americanism or security. It is the rise to power of the demagogue who lives on untruth; it is the spreading of fear and the destruction of faith in every level of society.

Dalton Trumbo, speech to the Screen Writers Guild when accepting the Laurel Award in 1970.

The blacklist was a time of evil, and that no one on either side who survived it came through untouched by evil. Caught in a situation that had passed beyond the control of mere individuals, each person reacted as his nature, his needs, his convictions, and his particular circumstances compelled him to. There was bad faith and good, honesty and dishonesty, courage and cowardice, selflessness and opportunism, wisdom and stupidity, good and bad on both sides.

When you who are in your forties or younger look back with curiosity on that dark time, as I think occasionally you should, it will do no good to search for villains or heroes or saints or devils because there were none; there were only victims. Some suffered less than others, some grew and

some diminished, but in the final tally we were all victims because almost without exception each of us felt compelled to say things he did not want to say, to do things that he did not want to do, to deliver and receive wounds he truly did not want to exchange. That is why none of us - right, left, or centre - emerged from that long nightmare without sin.

Barry Goldwater, *With No Apologies* (1979)

Joe McCarthy was unquestionably the most controversial man I ever served with in the Senate. The anti-anticommunists were outraged at his claims that some of the principals in the Truman and Roosevelt administrations actively served the communist causes.

McCarthy was supported by a strong, nationwide constituency, which included among others, Joseph P. Kennedy, the father of John, Bob, and Edward. A variety of respected, creditable federal employees disturbed by security risks in the national government provided McCarthy with a steady stream of inside information.

The liberals mounted a skillfully orchestrated campaign of criticism against Joe McCarthy. Under the pressure of criticism, he reacted angrily. It is probably true that McCarthy drank too much, overstated his case, and refused to compromise, but he wasn't alone in his beliefs.

Lee J. Cobb was one of those who was originally blacklisted but eventually agreed to do a deal with the HUAC.

When the facilities of the government of the United States are drawn on an individual it can be terrifying. The blacklist is just the opening gambit - being deprived of work. Your passport is confiscated. That's minor. But not being able to move without being tailed is something else. After a certain point it grows to implied as well as articulated threats, and people succumb. My wife did, and she was institutionalized. In 1953 the HUAC did a deal with me. I was pretty much worn down. I had no money. I couldn't borrow. I had the expenses of taking care of the children. Why am I subjecting my loved ones to this? If it's worth dying for, and I am just as idealistic as the next fellow. But I decided it wasn't worth dying for, and if this gesture was the way of getting out of the penitentiary I'd do it. I had to be employable again.